

WOMEN AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Regular physical activity and good eating habits can improve women's health and help prevent many of the diseases and conditions that are major causes of death and disability for women around the world.
- Regular physical activity helps prevent cardiovascular diseases (CVDs). These diseases, which include heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke, account for one-third of deaths among women around the world. CVDs cause half of all deaths in women over 50 in developing countries.
- Regular physical activity, combined with adequate diet has shown to be one of the most effective means of controlling mild to moderate obesity and maintaining an ideal body weight in women.
- Diabetes affects more than 70 million women in the world. This figure is projected to double by 2025. Diabetes can lead – in addition to CVDs – to blindness, nerve damage, kidney failure, foot ulceration and amputation. A recent study shows that even modest regular physical activity and dietary changes can prevent more than half of the cases of non-insulin dependent diabetes.
- Physical activity can also greatly help prevent and manage osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is a disease in which bones become fragile and more likely to break. Women, particularly post-menopausal, have a higher risk of developing osteoporosis than men.
- Weight-bearing activities such as walking, dancing and jogging, is essential for normal skeletal development in the childhood and adolescence, and may help in decreasing bone loss. It also improves muscle strength and balance and reduces the risk of falling, thereby helping to prevent fractures.
- Regular physical activity helps reduce stress, anxiety, depression and loneliness – this is particularly important for women as rates of depression for women are almost double those of men in both developed and developing countries. Physical activity also helps build self-esteem, confidence and promote psychological well-being and social integration.
- Although the health and social benefits of physical activities should in principle encourage women's participation in physical activity, one should not overlook the fact that in rural areas and in low income peri-urban areas of developing countries women may be already physically exhausted by other forms of day-long "occupational" physical activities in and outside the home. These women groups may need a better balanced set of support actions such as adequate nutrition, income generation initiatives, advise on physical activities most relevant to their specific conditions and possibly adapted leisure pursuits.
- Arthritis is an important cause of activity limitation among adult and elderly people. Physical activity is a means to control joint swelling and joint pain in arthritis, thus reducing the consequences of the disease for everyday well-being.

